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BY H. L. MENCKEN

Hitlerismus

MY BATTLE, by Adolf Hitler; abridged and translated by E. T. S. Dugdale. $3. 5¼ x 8; 297 pp. Boston: *The Houghton Mifflin Company.*

THE EXPERIMENT WITH DEMOCRACY IN CENTRAL EUROPE, by Arnold J. Zurcher. $2.50. 5¼ x 8; 328 pp. New York: *The Oxford University Press.*

HITLER'S REICH: THE FIRST PHASE, by Hamilton Fish Armstrong. $1. 5⅛ x 7⅜; 73 pp. New York: *The Macmillan Company.*

GERMANY ENTERS THE THIRD REICH, by Calvin B. Hoover. $2.50. 5⅝ x 8⅜; 243 pp. New York: *The Macmillan Company.*

THE BROWN BOOK OF THE HITLER TERROR AND THE BURNING OF THE REICHSTAG, prepared by the World Committee for the Victims of German Fascism. $2.50. 5 x 7⅞; 348 pp. New York: *Alfred A. Knopf.*

I LIST a few of the first-comers among what promises to be a long procession of Hitler books. We are in for a great flood of them, like the flood of Russian books two or three years ago. At the time these lines are written Hitler has just flung his defiance to the world, and no man can say what his position may be by the time they come into print. On the one hand, he may have forced France and England into something resembling acquiescence in his demands, though they will never, of course, admit categorically that they have yielded; and on the other hand, they may be preparing to dislodge him by force, and have even proceeded to do so. But whatever the issue, it must be manifest that he has given Europe its greatest scare since the Bolsheviki reached the gates of Warsaw in 1920, and that the newspapers will print many a black headline before the debate over him is ended, and he sinks at last into the gray gloom of exploded and forgotten politicians.

The most surprising thing about him, it seems to me, is that his emergence should have been surprising. He was, in fact, implicit in the Treaty of Versailles, and, indeed, in what passed, toward the end of the war, as the Allies' statement of war aims. The underlying purpose of the whole uproar, we were told, was to heave out the Hohenzollerns, and give the German people the great boon of democratic government. There was no sign that any considerable portion of them longed for it, but nevertheless it was to be given to them. Ostensibly, the aim here was purely philanthropic: the Germans were to be lifted up in spite of themselves. But under that lofty purpose there lurked a scarcely concealed desire to make and keep them weak, and it was generally believed that both birds might be brought down with the same stone. The old imperial army, though it had been beaten at last, had held out against all the rest of Europe for four long years, and the evidences of its appalling prowess were on every side. No one wanted another dose out of the same bottle, and it was felt that a good way to avoid it would be to turn out the undivided and highly military Hohenzollerns and set up a gang of democratic politicians, who could be trusted to spend most of their time and energy fighting one another, and so have little left for the external foes of their country.

This was wise reasoning so far as it went, but unfortunately it overlooked some unpleasant corollaries. The politicians who began practise in Berlin actually behaved, at least for eight or ten years, precisely as the Allied metaphysicians had expected. That is, they devoted themselves wholeheartedly to getting and keeping jobs for themselves and their friends, and were willing to make almost any imaginable sacrifice of their country's interest to that end. They agreed to the Dawes Plan, the Young Plan and a dozen other such fine schemes, all of them designed to keep Germany bankrupt and impotent. They were quite willing, on the one hand, to ruin German capital, and on the other hand, to enslave German labor, if only they and their gangs could continue in office thereby. When, as and if any German protested he was proceeded against with great vigor by the *Polizei*, and if he proceeded from talk to acts he was denounced to the common enemy, and in not a few cases actually put in the way of losing his life. Meanwhile, these stupid and often knavish politicos were depicted in the Allied and American press as great statesmen, and the fact was conveniently overlooked that a huge gulf was beginning to yawn between the German government and the German people.

The situation became so unendurable a year or two ago that even the Allied diplomats, an extraordinarily stupid class of men, began to realize that if it were not relieved there would be an explosion. Accordingly, certain concessions to the realities began to be made. Unfortunately, they were made grudgingly and did not go far enough; worse, they were arrived at after open and often raucous debate, so that everyone, including the more intelligent Germans, could see plainly that there was little honest good-will in them, but mainly only the yearning of England to get ahead of France, or *vice versa*, or the desire of Mussolini to shine as a world statesman. As for the common people in Germany, they began to despair. The prevailing politicians, at best, were only too plainly duffers, and it began to be obvious that the country would go to pot if they continued in power.

The German masses were thus ripe for demagogues, and the preaching of new and revolutionary arcana. Both appeared promptly, for both had been in waiting since the first dreadful years after the war. There were two gangs of these demagogues. The one preached Communism and the other a kind of Fascism. Each promised, if put into power, to proceed at once to the elimination of the other. The Communists, with the horrible writhings of Russia so close and so full of warning, found it impossible to convince any considerable number of sensible men, but they made good progress among university innocents of the type of our own Brain Trust, and they found it easy to round up millions of recruits among the proletariat, which had nothing to lose but its chains. The Fascists appealed rather to the middle class, which had been ruined once by the Berlin politicians and was in fear of being ruined again. They made but little more impression on the enlightened minority than the Communists, but what they proposed was at least less cannibalistic than Communism, and most of them, at the worst, were at any rate Germans, so they began to gather support in the upper income brackets, and to enjoy the advantages that go with having money to pay for newspapers, parades and brass bands.

The ensuing combat was depicted by most of the American correspondents resident in Berlin as a low comedy comparable to one of our own presidential cam-

paigns, and few of them believed that either the Communists or the Fascists would fetch the great body of non-political and naturally conservative Germans, most of whom, and especially the farmers, had a certain nostalgia for the Hohenzollerns, and were eager only to be let alone, that they might work hard and reaccumulate the capital wasted by the war, the subsequent inflation, and the pestilence of politicians. Many of these correspondents apparently believed that the Communists had the better of it; I can recall only one who predicted formally that the Fascists would really attain to power. The rest overlooked two things. The first was that the Fascists had much more money than the Communists, and could thus give a better show. The second was that they had developed in one Adolf Hitler, an obscure Austrian, a demagogic rhetorician of the first calibre—indeed, a fit match for either William Jennings Bryan or David Lloyd George, or for the two taken together.

This Hitler began modestly, and for a long while was a very minor figure in German politics. Down to 1923, when he got involved in some riots instigated by General Ludendorff and was jailed for a few months, he was scarcely heard of outside Bavaria. His political ideas, at that time, were somewhat vague. He had started out in Vienna as a Socialist enemy of the Hapsburgs, but had afterward shopped around among the small and often preposterous minor parties that arose in Germany after the war. Put up to speak, from time to time, for these discordant causes, he discovered an extraordinary talent as a mob orator, and was soon, as he himself says in "My Battle," "a master of this craft." It was a common feat for him to face a hostile audience of three or four thousand, and bring it galloping to the mourner's bench in an hour. German politics, in those days as in these, ran to roughhouse, and Hitler did not disdain the protection of strong-arm men, but three times out of four he really didn't need it. He achieved on one occasion the impressive feat of talking down a hall full of Communists: many of them, in fact, rushed up to join him at the end, though neither he nor they knew where he was headed.

It is easy to see from Hitler's book that he is anything but a political philosopher. What he says in it is often sensible enough —for example, when he argues that Germany's first big task is to collar Austria and so consolidate the German people, and again when he argues that its natural route of expansion is along the Baltic, and yet again when he argues that it can never hope to make an honest friend of France—but always it has an air of second hand. In this it greatly resembles Bryan's "The First Battle," another effort by a mob orator to make effective rhetoric of the ideas of other men. Hitler was tutored as he went along by various theorists, but he quickly translated their theories into catchwords of his own, and he is quite as far from some of them today as Stalin is from Trotzky or Roosevelt from Moley. As an orator he is incomparable, at least in Germany. England may have his match in Lloyd George, as we had his match in Bryan, but the Germans have not seen his like in modern times. It is thus no wonder that they wallow in his terrific eloquence, and forget to notice that what he says is often absurd.

His anti-Semitism, which has shocked so many Americans, is certainly nothing to marvel over. Anti-Semitism is latent all over Western Europe, as it is in the United States, and whenever there are public turmoils and threats of public perils it tends to flare up, as it did in France in 1894, when the French feared a new Franco-

German war, and in Austria during the lunatic days following the war. The disadvantage of the Jew is that, to simple men, he always seems a kind of foreigner. He practises a religion that is not common, he has customs that seem strange to the general, and only too often he indulges imprudently in talk about going back to his own country some day, and reviving the power and glory of his forefathers. He is commonly a fierce patriot in whatever land he lives in, and he certainly was, at least in most cases, in Germany during the war, but his patriotism is always ameliorated, despite its excess, by a touch of international-mindedness born of his history, and in consequence he is commonly held suspect by patriots who can't see beyond their own frontiers. Thus he is an easy mark for demagogues when the common people are uneasy, and it is useful to find a goat. He has served as such a goat a hundred times in the past, and he will probably continue in the rôle, off and on, until his racial differentiation disappears or he actually goes back to his fatherland. In Germany, as in Poland, Austria and France, he has been made use of by demagogues for many years, precisely as the colored brother has been made use of in our own South.

But at the time Hitler began to prowl the land the Jew was suspect in Germany for another reason, to wit, his entanglement with Bolshevism. This entanglement, in large part, was imaginary, and at best it was much exaggerated, but nevertheless it had some reality, at least in the plain man's eye. There were plenty of Jews among the Moscow master-minds, and they had proved their puissance by putting down Jew-baiting in Russia, for long the chief field sport of the Christian masses there. Moreover, the bloody *Räterepublik* at Munich—long forgotten elsewhere, but only too well remembered in Germany—had been set up and bossed by a Jew, and there were other Jews high in the councils of the Communist party, which proposed openly to repeat the Munich pillages and butcheries all over the country. It was thus easy for Hitler to convince his customers that there was peril in Israel, and in the end he managed to convince the more credulous of them that even the Jewish bankers, judges, doctors and store-keepers of Berlin were suspicious characters, though actually nine-tenths of them were quite as orthodox, politically speaking, as the men of their several classes in New York.

What followed was certainly not creditable to the German people, nor indeed to the human race in general. Once the paranoiacs on the lower levels were turned loose they proceeded instantly to extravagant barbarities, and the most innocent man, when he came under their fire, was no safer than the actually guilty. If Hitler had been able to confine the hunting to Communists there would have been no complaint in the United States and very little in England, for the Communists openly condone the even worse brutalities that have gone on in Russia, and would repeat them all over the world if they had the means. But when the Brown Shirts began to harass and intimidate, flay and murder perfectly innocent and helpless people, some of them Jews but probably more of them Christians, and very few of them Communists, then the world was shocked indeed, and Hitler has now discovered that shocking it is a very serious and dangerous business, with results not to be disposed of by oratory.

In such matters what is done cannot be undone; the main question, as I write, is how long the orgy will last, and whether it will wear itself out or have to be put

down by external force. If the latter is resorted to, and it takes the form of military pressure, we are probably in for another World War, though it may not follow immediately. The Germans, of course, without adequate arms, could not resist the French, but once the French got across the Rhine it would be difficult if not impossible for them to come back, and their presence there would inevitably set off a general conflagration. A general boycott would not be as dangerous, but its effect, I think, would be to strengthen rather than weaken Hitler at home, where his theory of a huge conspiracy against Germany would begin to be believed in by millions who now doubt it. Moreover, such a boycott would be resisted elsewhere in the world, and here in the United States it might easily launch a formidable anti-Semitic movement, especially in view of the fact that many of the current Jewish leaders in this country are very loud and brassy fellows, with an unhappy talent for making the *Goyim* Jew-conscious.

There remains the remedy of sober second thought. It can be relied on to cure even the wildest and wooliest of public manias soon or late, but unfortunately it takes time. That a majority of Germans will go on yielding to Hitler *ad infinitum* is hard to believe, and in fact downright incredible. Either he will have to change his programme so that it comes into reasonable accord with German tradition and the hard-won principia of modern civilization, or they will rise against him and turn him out. He has the bayonets today and so he seems irresistible, but it is not to be forgotten that those same bayonets, on some near tomorrow, may be turned against him, and that he has only one throat to cut. Mussolini, to be sure, has lasted since 1922 and the Bolsheviks of Moscow since 1917. But I incline to think that the Germans are much less likely to follow Slav and Latin example in this matter than to stick to the ways of their own blood.

Bryan, in all probability, was actually elected President of the United States in 1896, and yet by 1904 he was already a comic character, and before he died his old huge following had shrunk to a feeble rabble of half-wits. Lloyd George was the sole and absolute proprietor of Great Britain in 1919, but today he bosses only himself.

The Ku Klux Klan in 1920 had millions of members, could count upon close to a majority in Congress, and controlled at least twenty States, but by 1925 it was dispersed and impotent, and its Hitler was in jail. The American Legion ran amuck at about the same time, and somewhere in my files are at least twenty pounds of newspaper clippings describing the heroic mauling of unarmed and helpless persons, including many Jews, by its brave lads. Yet the Legion, today, is simply a gang of professional pension-grabbers, and even politicians kick it about.